

Mountains ADAPT

Small Grants Funding Scheme

Grants Scheme Overview

Regions of implementation:	East African Community (EAC) & South Caucasus (SC)
Eligible Countries	Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South-Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia
Implementing organizations	Registered non-governmental & Civil society organizations (NGOs), preferably grassroots, community-based (CBO), youth or women organizations
Thematic areas	– Restoring ecosystems – Water harvesting and retention – Climate-smart agriculture and food security – Disaster preparedness – Enhancing and diversifying income sources – Improving health and quality of life
Grant amount per project	Up to 30,000 USD
Benefitting group	Local mountain communities
Implementation Timeframe	12 Months

Eligibility to apply

The SGFS provides funding to **civil society organizations, preferably grassroots, community-based, youth or women organizations** delivering community-based actions to adapt to climate change impacts in mountain communities of the East African Community and the South Caucasus.

Main eligibility criteria for applicants are that they:

- Face a **mountain climate-change** related **issue**, or **vulnerability** to address, with the goal to preserve, restore or improve livelihoods, ecosystems and enhance food security.
- Be a registered **organization, locally-based** in a mountain region of the respective benefitting countries (in EAC and SC) working on delivering benefits and services to mountain ecosystems and communities.
- Show **experience working** with and in **projects** benefitting communities, a proven focus on implementing adaptation and/or environmental activities will be an asset.

Applicants who will support women and girls' empowerment, promote their rights and capacities, and enhance gender balance, will be prioritized.

The scheme finances innovative mountain **resilience-building action** in communities vulnerable to the **effects of climate change**. Projects should empower local communities, respond to identified climate risks and impacts, be coherent with relevant (sub)national policies and plans, and integrate **Nature-based Solutions (NbS)** as a core cross-cutting approach. All supported initiatives are encouraged to include capacity building, strengthen traditional knowledge systems, and address the specific challenges faced by women and youth and other vulnerable groups.

Activities should adopt a holistic and sustainable livelihoods approach **in one or more thematic areas**, which may include but are not limited to:

- **Restoring ecosystems:** Rehabilitate degraded landscapes using NbS, in line with the *UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration*¹ and its guiding principles, to build both ecological integrity and livelihood resilience.
- **Water harvesting and retention:** Improve and maintain community water infrastructure (e.g. water supply system) by applying ecosystem-based approaches and ensuring equitable access for community members.
- **Climate-smart agriculture and food security:** Transform agri-food systems towards green and climate resilient practices, e.g. by promoting drought-resistant crops and seed varieties, fostering agroecology & permaculture; supporting drip irrigation and rainwater harvesting, promoting composting, mulching, and regenerative farming for soil health improvements.
- **Disaster preparedness:** Support ecosystem-based disaster preparedness by assessing community-level risks, developing localized early warning systems, possible changes in land use, and building partnerships.
- **Enhancing and diversifying income sources:** Promote alternative livelihoods such as sustainable value chains, eco-tourism, and NbS-linked enterprise development.

¹ The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030), led by UNEP and FAO, calls for global action to prevent, halt and reverse ecosystem degradation. Its guiding principles emphasize ecological integrity, inclusivity, equity, sustainability, and long-term benefits for both people and nature. More information: www.decadeonrestoration.org

- **Improving health and quality of life:** Reduce heat stress, environmental pollution and improve living conditions, e.g. through access to inclusive public or recreational spaces.

Application process

Applicants should fill in project-relevant information and upload necessary documentation using the online application link.

Documents

The applicants will be asked to upload some supporting documents with their application such as:

- Organization's registration certificate
- Banking details of the organization (only selected ones)
- Passport of the legal representant (only selected ones)
- Additional information as may be required

All the documents, including the project information, can be written in **national or English languages**.

Eligibility screening

Once an application is submitted through the online tool, implementing partners will review and validate all applications, in consultation with the UNEP project team, and engage with proponents in case it's necessary to request additional information from applicants. Implementing partners should carefully review and validate (if needed) all the information submitted, to ensure that the following minimum criteria are met:

- ✓ No essential information requested during the application process is left blank by the applicant.
- ✓ The applicant is a duly registered CBO, trusted locally and financially viable
- ✓ The issue described is related to climate-change adaptation in a mountain region.
- ✓ The solution proposed should primarily be a nature-based solution and follow a holistic approach.
- ✓ The solution proposed complies with UNEP safeguard standards following the guiding principles of UNEP's Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework (ESSF)².

Eligibility Screening Criteria

To ensure fair, transparent, and compliant management a set of clear eligibility screening criteria will be applied:

- Is the applicant a registered community-based or civil society organization in a benefitting mountain region?
- Does the proposal address a clearly identified climate change-related challenge or vulnerability?
- Is the proposed solution primarily a Nature-based Solution or Ecosystem-based Adaptation measure?

² <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/32022>

- Is the applicant financially and operationally capable of managing a small grant (e.g., basic bookkeeping)
- Does the applicant demonstrate accountability to the community, (e.g. involvement and communication with the benefiting community on the use of the grant and their support)?
- Does the applicant have prior experience with local project implementation?
- Has the applicant demonstrated a commitment to gender equity and social inclusion?
- Is the applicant institutionally independent from local government authorities (i.e., not a direct arm of government or a political entity)?
- Does the budget **exclude** direct salary payments or allowances to government officials (including local municipality representatives), in line with UNEP financial rules?*
- Does the proposal demonstrate awareness of relevant (sub)national climate or adaptation policies and how the proposed activity may contribute to their local implementation?

These criteria serve not only to assess technical suitability but also to uphold principles of **accountability, anti-corruption, protection from sexual abuse, human rights, and responsible use of funds**.

**Note: Involvement of local officials in project activities (e.g., facilitation, oversight) may be supported through in-kind collaboration or government co-financing but should not involve direct payments from SGFS grants.*

Integrity and Complaint Mechanism

To further safeguard the integrity of SGFS implementation at the local level, a simple and accessible **complaint and feedback mechanism** has been set in place. This will allow community members, stakeholders, or grantee partners to report concerns confidentially, including issues related to misuse of funds, favoritism, or exclusion in any step of the process.

Key features:

- Anonymous complaint submission form (digital and/or physical drop-box during project visits).
- Shared email address managed by UNEP and monitored jointly with ARCOS/Sustainable Caucasus.
- Guidance provided to communities at kick-off events on their rights and how to report concerns.
- Protocol for follow-up, investigation, and documentation, respecting confidentiality and fairness.

Proposals Assessment & Selection

To ensure consistency, transparency, and comparability, all eligible applications will be reviewed using a **Standardized Application Assessment Summary/Template (Annex 1)**. This format presents a concise yet comprehensive overview of each proposal, including thematic alignment, eligibility screening, scoring results, and reviewer observations.

The Standardized Summary Template includes five sections: (1) Basic Application Information, (2) Project Thematic Focus and Summary, (3) Eligibility Check, (4) Scoring Summary based on the Qualitative Evaluation Framework, and (5) Key Observations and Recommendations. This uniform format enhances transparency, simplifies the review

workload, and supports evidence-based, fair, and participatory funding decisions. To ensure transparency and facilitate the submissions of comprehensive proposals, the Evaluation Rubric will be shared openly along the Call for Proposals.

Qualitative Evaluation

Eligible applications will be put forward to the established regional Selection Committee for qualitative assessment and funding selection. Members will be requested to **individually review and score** each summarized application using the evaluation rubric. Each application should be scored against the **evaluation rubric (Annex 2)** below. Use the scoring guide to assign a value within the specified range (0 - 100 points) as part of a two-tiered assessment process:

- i. Each member will carry out an **individual evaluation of proposals**, leveraging their contextual knowledge and local policy alignment expertise.
- ii. These individual assessments will then be compiled into an **aggregated scoring sheet** and highlight the **top-ranked applications** for each country.

Project Selection

Following the qualitative evaluation, **the full Selection Committee will jointly deliberate** on the aggregate scoring sheet **and make a final funding decision** on which applications to approve. The results of the project selection will be communicated through a transparent. Each applicant will receive a formal **notification of outcome**³ via email. Notifications will include:

- A clear statement on whether the proposal was selected or not approved.
- A summary of the application's strengths and weaknesses based on evaluation feedback.
- For successful applicants, next steps are regarding full project design, implementation planning, and compliance requirements.
- For unsuccessful applicants, an offer to access tailored feedback and learning resources, **where feasible**.

A consolidated list of selected projects detailing project titles, implementing organizations, countries, thematic focus, and grant amounts will be published on the project website. This will be accompanied by a news release (potentially via social media or newsletter) highlighting:

- The number of applications received and reviewed.
- Selection process overview and criteria.
- Geographic and thematic trends observed during the call.

Frequently Asked Questions

⇒ Eligibility

Who can apply for the grant? Civil society organizations, preferably grassroots, community-based, youth or women organizations delivering, among others, community-based actions to

³ **Legal Disclaimer:** Notification of selection does not constitute a binding agreement or legal commitment by UNEP. Final approval and disbursement of funds are subject to successful completion of all due diligence checks, compliance requirements, and the signing of a formal grant agreement. Applicants are advised not to make financial or operational commitments based solely on the outcome notification.

adapt to climate change impacts in mountain communities of the East African Community and the South Caucasus.

Are individuals eligible, or only registered organizations? Only registered organizations are eligible to apply.

Do organizations need to be formally registered to qualify? Yes. Only formally registered organizations are eligible to apply. Applicants must upload their official registration certificate as part of the application form. If selected, the organization will also need to have an official bank account (not a personal/individual) to receive the funds.

Are there geographic or thematic restrictions (e.g., only organizations in certain regions or working on specific issues)? Yes. Eligible organizations must demonstrate experience working directly with the benefiting mountain community. Applicants should also show proven capacity to implement the proposed projects. A strong experience in implementing adaptation and/or environmental activities will be considered an asset during the evaluation process.

Do organizations need to have prior experience implementing international funds? No, organizations only need to demonstrate prior experience working with and in projects benefiting mountain communities, not necessarily from international funding sources.

⇒ Application Process

How to apply for the grant? Applicants must complete and submit the full application form available at [this link](#).

What documents are required with the application? Applicants must submit the organization's valid registration certificate. Additionally, if selected, applicant must present official banking details of the organization (must coincide with the organization's registry) and the national ID card or passport of the organization's legal representative.

Is there an application deadline? Yes, only applications received before **15th September 2026** at 11:59 pm (East African Time/South Caucasus Time) will be considered.

Can applications be submitted in languages other than English? Yes. Application form can also be accessed and filled in any of the following languages: Armenian, Azerbaijani, French, Georgian and Kiswahili.

⇒ Funding Details

What is the maximum and minimum grant amount available? The maximum grant amount available is USD 30,000. There is no defined minimum amount. However, applicants are encouraged to request sufficient funding to implement substantive, nature-based solutions and on-the-ground activities.

What kind of solutions can be proposed? Projects should empower local communities, respond to identified climate risks and impacts through ecosystem-based approaches and/or implementing Nature-based Solutions to, for example, restore ecosystems, harvest rain water, climate-smart agriculture, disaster preparedness, diversifying incomes among other. You can get some inspirations from the Booklets: [Mountains ADAPT: Solutions from East Africa](#) and the [Mountains ADAPT: Solutions from the South Caucasus](#)

What types of expenses can the grant cover? Grant funds may be used to cover a wide range of eligible expenses, including staff and hired experts' salaries, equipment and materials, training and capacity-building activities, operational and administrative costs, other project-related expenses directly tied to implementation.

Are there restrictions on how the funds can be used? All expenditures must: align closely with the approved project idea, be well justified in the application, demonstrate efficiency and sustainability in implementation.

The budget cannot include any direct salary payments or allowances to government officials (including local municipality representatives), in line with UNEP financial rules and regulations. Involvement of local officials in project activities (e.g., facilitation, oversight) can be included, but it must be covered through in-kind collaboration or government co-financing, and it should not involve direct payments from SGFS grants.

Is co-funding required? Co-funding is not a mandatory requirement. However, projects that have existing or anticipated co-funding (for example, from a local municipality or other partners) will be considered an asset during the selection process.

⇒ **Selection Criteria**

How will applications be evaluated? Applications will go through the simple eligibility screening phase to ensure they comply with the Eligibility Criteria (see more details in the Annexes section). After pre-screening, applications will be reviewed by a Selection Committee using the **Evaluation Matrix** attached to the Annexes section.

What are the key criteria for selection? The key selection criteria are the proposed solution's relevance to local climate vulnerabilities, technical feasibility, inclusivity (gender/youth/etc.), innovation/scaling potential, community ownership and participation, safeguard compliance and sustainability (see more details in the Annexes section).

Who makes the final decision on grant awards? Selection Committees in the South Caucasus and East African Community will evaluate all shortlisted projects and makes funding decisions (see more details in the Annexes section).

Will unsuccessful applicants receive feedback? Each applicant will receive a notification of outcome on whether the proposal was selected or not. Unsuccessful applications will also receive feedback.

⇒ **Implementation and Reporting**

What happens after successful projects are identified? Selected organizations will be asked to develop a detailed implementation plan, including key milestones and timelines. Grantees' capacities will be assessed, and tailored capacity-building support will be provided to ensure projects are technically sound, inclusive, and align with UNEP's social and environmental standards and safeguards.

What reporting requirements will grantees have? Grantees must report according to the defined timeline in their implementation plan. Reports should include: evidence of progress against milestones, budget spending and financial records, visual materials (e.g., photos, videos) documenting activities.

How often must progress reports be submitted? Two narrative and financial reports are required: A mid-term report and a final report upon completion of project activities. Other complementary monitoring activities can be requested as agreed during the development of the implementation plan.

Are site visits or audits part of the monitoring process? Projects will be randomly selected for field monitoring visits. Selected projects will be closely monitored to ensure compliance and accountability.

⇒ **Timeline**

When will successful applicants be notified? Third quarter 2026.

When should the project implementation start? Fourth quarter 2026.

What is the grant implementation period? 12 months.

⇒ **Support**

Is there technical assistance available during the application process? For technical assistance or any clarifications, please contact UNEP project team at unep-mountainsadapt@un.org

Will training or capacity building be provided to grantees? Yes. Tailored capacity-building support will be provided to grantees after their capacity needs are assessed.

Annex 1. Standardized Application Assessment Summary

Section 1: Basic Information

Field	Details
Application ID	[Auto-generated]
Country / Region	[e.g., Armenia / South Caucasus]
Applicant Organization	[Name]
Legal Status	[Registered CBO/NGO/Women's group/etc.]
Project Title	[Full Title]
Grant Requested	[\$ USD]
Implementation Duration	[e.g., 12 months]
Location	[Municipality/District, GPS if available]

Section 2: Thematic Focus & Summary

Focus Area(s)	[✓ Climate-Smart Agriculture / ✓ Ecosystem Restoration / etc.]
Brief Project Description	[3–5 sentences summarizing core activities & intended impacts]

Section 3: Eligibility Pre-Screening

Eligibility Criteria	Yes / No
Registered community-based organization	
Climate change adaptation-related	
Nature-based/ecosystem-based solution	
Financial and operational viability confirmed	
Safeguards compliance (pre-check)	

Proposals must mark all boxes as "Yes" to pass the eligibility screening.

Section 4: Evaluation Summary/Scoring Rubric

Criterion	Max Score	Score Awarded	Remarks
Relevance to local climate vulnerabilities & policy priorities	20 pts		
Technical feasibility	20 pts		
Inclusivity (gender/youth/etc.)	15 pts		
Innovation / Scaling potential	15 pts		
Community ownership & participation	15 pts		
Safeguard compliance & sustainability	15 pts		
Total Score	100 pts	[xx/100]	

Applications scoring below 60/100 should be flagged for review or rejection.

Section 5: Notes from Selection Committee

Observations	Remarks
Key strengths	[e.g., strong local government collaboration, well-developed M&E]
Key risks / weaknesses	[e.g., limited prior implementation experience, weak financials]
Alignment with national priorities	[e.g., aligns with national adaptation plan priority sector]
Need for additional clarification?	[Yes/No – if Yes, specify what]

Annex 2. Selection Committee Assessment matrix

Criterion	Weight	Scoring Guide	Comments/Notes
1. Relevance to local climate vulnerabilities and National/Local Priorities	20 pts	- 0–5: Vague or misaligned - 6–10: General relevance - 11–15: Clearly aligned - 16–20: Strong, evidence-based alignment with climate risks and official priorities	Does the project directly address identified climate vulnerabilities and contribute to national/local adaptation goals?
2. Technical Feasibility & Sustainability	20 pts	- 0–5: Unclear or impractical - 6–10: Modest but workable - 11–15: Feasible with minor risks - 16–20: Well-designed and realistically implementable	Are the proposed activities technically sound and feasible within the timeframe and budget? Are risks adequately managed?
3. Inclusivity & Gender/Youth Responsiveness	15 pts	- 0–5: No inclusion strategy - 6–10: Moderate attention - 11–15: Strong, integrated inclusivity plan	Does the project empower marginalized groups (e.g., women, youth, Indigenous people) in meaningful roles?
4. Innovation & Scaling Potential	15 pts	- 0–5: No novelty or replication - 6–10: Some elements adaptable - 11–15: Clearly innovative and scalable	Does the solution introduce new ideas, approaches, or models that could be replicated in other contexts?
5. Community Ownership & Participation	15 pts	- 0–5: Top-down planning - 6–10: Some consultation - 11–15: Strong participatory planning and local ownership	Were communities involved in project design? Will they lead or co-implement?
6. Risk Management & Safeguard Integration	15 pts	- 0–5: No risk or safeguard consideration - 6–10: Basic recognition of risks with limited mitigation - 11–15: Clear identification of environmental and social risks with appropriate mitigation measures	Has the project identified potential risks (e.g., harm to ecosystems, exclusion of vulnerable groups, local tensions)? Are there realistic mitigation measures in place? Does the project avoid doing harm while promoting co-benefits?

Total Score: ____ / 100

Optional: Qualitative Comments Section

- **Strengths:**
- **Weaknesses or Concerns:**
- **Suggested Conditions (if applicable):**

Rating Bands

- **90–100:** Outstanding – Recommend for funding without reservation
- **75–89:** Strong – Recommend, may require minor clarification
- **60–74:** Moderate – Consider if aligned with specific priorities or funding remains
- **Below 60:** Weak – Do not recommend for current round